

Nail Gun Accidents Teach Sobering Lessons

A series of accidents involving air-powered nail guns last summer brought home the fact that the productive and powerful tools are also highly dangerous and need to be handled with respect. In the most tragic case, a framing nail punctured the heart of carpenter Camillo Juandelos on a home construction site in Ocean View, Md., in July, ending the man's life at the age of 25. Police said Camillo's brother Jesus was holding the gun that fired the deadly nail.

According to reports in the *Delaware News-Journal*, the accident took place as the two men were framing new homes in a development in Ocean View. Jesus had been bending over a stud wall using the air nailer, and then straightened up and turned to call his brother. But Camillo was not on the other side of the room as Jesus thought; he was already standing right behind his brother. Camillo made contact with the nose of the nail gun, triggering

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Study Probes Nail Gun Risks

Nail guns are a major element of risk for residential carpenters, according to a recent article in the medical journal *Injury Prevention*. In a three-year study of union carpenters in the St. Louis, Mo., area, journeyman carpenters interviewed members who had reported a nail gun injury to identify factors contributing to the risk. In this survey, nail guns accounted for almost 14% of all injuries to carpenters. Most injuries were to hands, fingers, or wrists, but some involved the knee, face, or eye. Many were related to the contact-trip trigger, although most occurred during framing work, where the bounce-fire feature is not a big advantage, rather than while the workers were fastening sheathing. "Over 65% of the injuries associated with contact trip guns could likely be prevented by sequential triggers," said the authors.

Inexperience showed up as an important factor, the report notes: "Injuries were more common among apprentices, with 35% occurring in the first year of apprenticeship, 21% in the second year, 13% in the third year, and an additional 4% in the fourth year." Apprentices had three times the rate of nail gun injuries per hours worked as journeymen. The authors recommend formal training for carpenters required to use nail guns.

The full report, "Nail Gun Injuries in Residential Carpentry: Lessons From Active Injury Surveillance" is available online at <http://ip.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/9/1/20>.

Bucking Trend, California Picks NFPA Building Code

*IBC advocates
say politics
tainted process*

Amid the political chaos of California Governor Gray Davis's battle to fend off a recall campaign, the state's Building Standards Commission voted 10 to 2 in July to adopt the National Fire Protection Association's *NFPA 5000* code statewide for commercial buildings. At the same time, the governor-appointed board, which is dominated by union interests, voted to adopt the *International Residential Code [IRC] for One- and Two-Family Dwellings*. The two votes set up what could become the most confusing and contradictory code landscape in the nation for contractors who build multifamily as well as single-family residences.

Municipal building officials in California had overwhelmingly preferred the *International Building Code (IBC)* to the NFPA document. Building officials control the development of the International Codes, and in California they are already familiar with one of the IBC's precursors, ICBO's *Uniform Building Code*.

Playing politics. IBC backers complained that the fix was in for NFPA long before the vote occurred. A few went as far as to file conflict-of-interest complaints in mid-July against Building Standards Commission members Barry Broad (a Sacramento attorney and Teamsters union lobbyist) and Sidney Cavanaugh (a plumbers' union representative to NFPA).

The political clout of plumber and firefighter unions is a factor in code

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Nail Gun Accidents

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the bump-nail mechanism and taking the nail in his chest.

"It was just a strange thing that happened," Ocean View Police Chief Kenneth McLaughlin told the *News-Journal*, "a very, very unfortunate accident." The young carpenter died at the Peninsula Regional Medical Center in Salisbury, Md., after being evacuated by helicopter.

A nail-gun accident in Mississippi had a happier outcome, reports the *Biloxi Sun-Herald*. Stone County, Miss., contractor Duncan Hatten was crouching down to nail a 2x4 block

onto a column when he lost his balance and fell against the nail gun, which fired two quick nails into his heart. "I just figured I was gonna die," Hatten told local TV station WLOX. "I told my coworker to tell my family that I loved them." But the two framing spikes had narrowly missed major blood vessels, and surgeons were able to remove the nails from Hatten's heart in a two-hour operation.

And in Connecticut in August, a nail-gun incident highlighted the importance of training and supervision, as horseplay between two carpenters almost turned deadly. The *New Haven*

Register reported that carpenter Eric Haslob was in the hospital recovering from surgery to repair his heart after fellow carpenter Joseph Dupont fired a finish nail into Haslob's heart by accident as the two were fooling around on the job. A supervisor told the paper he had warned the two friends against horseplay just the day before.

Haslob has no hard feelings, he told the *Register*: "I don't think he meant to do it." But Dupont was fired after the incident, and police have reportedly charged him with reckless endangerment.

California Picks NFPA Building Code

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politics nationwide, but nowhere more than in California. Plumber and firefighter unions figure prominently in Governor Davis's fortunes. Both groups backed him with big campaign gifts in 2002, and they are among his chief supporters in fighting the recall. The two unions are heavily represented on the Building Standards Commission, and they also have a strong voice in the NFPA code. Firefighters, for example, have been able to push through a sub-code to the document that requires fire trucks to have four people on a crew instead of three. Plumbers for years have been able to limit the acceptance of PEX tubing, which threatens union jobs by reducing the labor time and skill level needed to plumb buildings.

Flawed language. The chief criticisms of *NFPA 5000* focus less on what it will and won't allow than on how it is written. Engineer Julius Ballanco lambasted an early draft of the document in *PM Engineer* magazine in 2001, writing, "If the committees were attempting to draft a document that nobody would ever want to use, they have accomplished their mission." Pointing out numerous contradictions and inconsistencies in the document, he concluded, "I can't



imagine any jurisdiction being stupid enough to adopt what is in the NFPA building code draft." Ballanco now says many of the glaring problems have been corrected. But he says, "A lot of *NFPA 5000* is still written more like a code commentary than like an actual enforceable code. It's going to have to be interpreted, and it is going to be very hard to enforce. There's going to be a heavy learning curve."

California Building Industry Association (CBIA) executive Bob Rivinius declines to discuss union politics, but he says, "We just don't see the point in having two codes instead of one." And like municipal officials, he objects to the way NFPA references dozens of other standards and codes. "To use it, you have to buy a lot of other books," says Rivinius. "The *International Building Code* references other standards in a few places, too, but you can usually put up your building based on just what's in the pages of the *IBC*."

As things now stand, *NFPA 5000* will become code in California in 2005. But Rivinius is not sure the Building Standards Commission decision will stand that long. "When there's politics involved," he says, "a lot can change in a short time."

Minnesota Building Official Makes Waves With Stucco Warning

He's taking heat from homeowners concerned about their property values, but Ron Glubka, top building official in the Minnesota community of Woodbury, isn't backing down from his warning to homeowners: If your house has a stucco exterior, watch out for hidden water damage.

Glubka says his inspectors have issued permits for repair of stucco-related water damage on hundreds of the town's 10,000 or so homes. Tracing the problem to inadequate building paper and improper flashings behind the hard cement coating, Glubka's department has introduced new required details for water-management systems under stucco installations in the town.

Some aggrieved homeowners complained to papers that Glubka was unfairly singling out stucco and lowering the market value of all stucco homes, even sound ones. But Glubka says town inspectors have started inspecting sheathing and framing under every type of cladding every time an existing wall is opened up for remodeling — and the damage he's concerned about is showing up only under stucco.

"The funny thing is, one of the people who was hollering the loudest about it went ahead and had his home inspected when he put it on the market, just because he had to," says Glubka. "And sure enough, under the windows, he needed repairs."

Minnesota Lath and Plaster Bureau director Steve Pedracine counters, "It's the windows that really should be getting more attention, not the stucco. We see leaks at window corners under every kind of cladding." Pedracine says



BRAD ORBERT, DR. STUCCO

This 1950s-era traditional three-coat stucco home in Minneapolis needs just surface repairs to a wall under a roof with no kickout flashing. Stucco professionals in Minnesota are struggling to understand why newer stucco applications are experiencing problems with water intrusion.

Woodbury homes with vinyl or metal siding do get water damage under windows but don't show up in Glubka's numbers because homeowners make repairs without pulling permits.

Workmanship issues. Woodbury's experience jibes with reports from other regions. Salt Lake contractor Dennis McCoy (see "A Close Look at Stucco," 9/03) consistently finds damaged framing and sheathing under stucco walls in both Utah and Texas, generally traceable to defects in flashing and building paper details. "I saw the same tell-tale signs of problems when I drove

around subdivisions in Colorado on a visit," says McCoy. Dark stains under windows and at roof-to-wall intersections are a dead giveaway that papers and flashings are done wrong, he says.

Bad workmanship is also blamed for stucco failures in Alberta, Canada, in a new report produced by the Ottawa engineering firm Morrison-Herschfield. The Alberta failures were noted in traditional three-coat stucco as well as in thin applications of newer proprietary two-coat or one-coat systems.

Likewise, British Columbia, whose wet, cool coastal climate bears little resemblance to that of Utah, Texas, or Alberta, faced a rash of rotten stucco-clad condos beginning in the 1990s. The failures included EIFS, one-coat, and traditional three-coat systems. The province now

licenses stucco remediation contractors and mandates "rainscreen" systems for all repair work, with water-draining air spaces behind the cementitious cladding and careful flashings at all joints and penetrations.

In Woodbury, Minn., Ron Glubka is concerned whether the town's new flashing requirements are enough to take care of the problem. "What worries me is that we have found cases where the rot is happening away from windows and corners, in the middle of a flat blank wall," he says. "In those cases, we're not sure how the water is getting in."

In college, I took a studio art class as an elective. The instructor started us out drawing simple objects: a box, an apple, and so forth. Gradually, she made the scenes more complex: multiple boxes, clothing draped on a chair, people. As the scenes got more complicated, my “control freak” personality began to manifest itself, and I became frustrated and almost paralyzed by my inability to fit every item in.

By the end of the class, however, when we were sent to draw entire cluttered rooms (pottery storage rooms and a greenhouse), I had learned, painfully, that to produce a clear result I had to decide *what to leave out*. When I tried to draw everything with equal detail and value, the result was unfocused and incomprehensible. Miraculously, when I picked a focus object and let the rest fade into the background, the scene made sense.

The position of many small business owners parallels my art class experience. At first the task is simple: Do

the work (and try to find time to ask for payment). As the business grows, the associated tasks become more numerous and more complex. It eventually becomes necessary to choose what to leave out of your own job description, in order to achieve focus and produce a clear image for yourself and others.

Unless you're a one-person operation, you can't (and shouldn't) do everything. First admit that, and then identify what your role should be. This involves some self-analysis and requires honesty. Once you have established your role, you have “selected” the focus of your work. Anything that enhances that role should be emphasized, and anything that detracts from it should be downplayed or eliminated from your job description. Find somebody else to do those tasks — because if you persist in trying to control everything, the result will be unfocused and chaotic. If you don't know what *your* job is, how can the rest of your team know what theirs is?

OFFCUTS

Mega-builder Lennar Corporation is moving into the urban condo market with high-rise projects and conversions of industrial or commercial space in several big cities, reports *Investor's Business Daily*. The company's main niche is suburban single-family developments, but it bought a salami factory and some other urban properties in San Francisco at an attractive price when the market went south several years ago, and is converting the buildings to trendy loft apartments.

Contractors have to tear out abandoned cables as part of any change to a commercial building's wiring, under the revised 2002 *National Electrical Code*, and the *Dallas Business Journal* says the new rule is causing headaches for building owners and remodelers. Many older buildings are choked with tangled old cabling left by previous tenants. Cables not properly terminated or tagged need to come out, but electricians fear that tearing out unmarked cables could interrupt someone's power or a vital communications link.

Tinder-dry forest conditions in Canada's British Columbia forced a halt to most logging operations in August, causing mills to shut down and lay off workers. The severe shortage of sawlogs put upward pressure on lumber prices, but



chief B.C. forester Larry Pedersen told the *Vancouver Sun* that depleted inventories and idled operations were just a temporary setback. Only a small fraction of the province's standing timber has actually burned, said Pedersen.

In Mega-Home Tally, California Stands (Far) Out

There's more than one reason they call it the Golden State. According to an analysis of census figures by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), California had 41% of the nation's million-dollar homes in 2000. It's a small market, noted NAHB CEO Jerry Howard: Only about 314,000 homes were valued at a million dollars or more in 2000, which amounts to barely .06% of all homes. California's mega-home count was 128,000.



But the percentages are striking, especially because no other state came close. New York in second place had just 22,300 million-dollar residences, for 7.1% of the total. Florida was third with about 18,000 (5.8%), Connecticut fourth with 13,900 (4.4%), and Illinois fifth with 12,400 (3.9%). Combined, those five states accounted for around 26% of the nation's housing stock, but had 62% of its million-dollar homes, said Howard.

If you're trying to avoid million-dollar houses, you might go to North Dakota, which had just 51 of them in 2000, or even South Dakota, which had 129. But Howard pointed out that dollar valuation by itself has limited meaning when comparing homes in different states. California home costs are heavily affected by land scarcity and heavy regulation, so that a million-dollar California home might cost considerably less to build somewhere else.

OFFCUTS

Colorado Treasurer Michael Coffman is "shocked" to find that executives at a state-established workers' comp insurance company paid themselves bonuses of up to \$419,000, reports the *Durango Herald*. Pinnacol, a company set up to cover employers left high and dry by the state's failing insurance pool, gets tax breaks and has special lenient reserve requirements. State legislator Mark Larson argues that the execs deserve their bonuses after making the company profitable and boosting its assets by \$71 million in 2002. But Coffman retorts that the growth in assets mostly came from the company's investments, which he manages.



A federal judge has released records from the antitrust suit against Weyerhaeuser, reports the Associated Press. Judge Owen Panner of the district court in Portland, Ore., brushed off Weyerhaeuser arguments that releasing the company's internal memos would give competitors an advantage. The documents, which helped convince a Portland jury to find Weyerhaeuser guilty of antitrust offenses and assess a \$78 million penalty, reportedly show Weyerhaeuser managers making plans to tie up timber supplies with contracts and predicting how long it would take for competing mills to fail.